

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

Sub 3
1. Footwear for protecting a foot comprising:

an upper defining an opening, the upper including:

an instep portion to cover a metatarsal section of the foot,

an elastic instep guard positioned on the instep portion to protect the metatarsal section of the foot, the instep guard including an elastic support having a plurality of hollow passages, and

a steel toe for protecting a toe region of the foot; and

an outsole attached to the upper to define a cavity that receives the foot through the opening.

Sub 1
2. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the instep guard includes:

a first sheet; and

a plurality of support members extending from the first sheet to define the plurality of the hollow passages.

3. The footwear of claim 2, wherein the instep guard further comprises a second sheet connected to the first sheet by the support members.

Sub 4
4. The footwear of claim 1, wherein at least some of the plurality of holes are defined by the first sheet and the support members.

5. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the hollow passages are filled with air.

6. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the hollow passages are elongated.

7. The footwear of claim 1, wherein at least one of the elongated hollow passages has cross-section that is either circular, ovoid, or triangular in shape.

8. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the support members define a first type of elongated passage with a first cross-section shape and a second type of elongated passage with a second cross-section shape.

9. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the instep guard includes a resilient material.

1 10. The footwear of claim 1, wherein the instep guard is positioned on an underside of the
2 instep portion of the footwear.

1 11. The footwear of claim 10, further comprising:

2 a liner positioned beneath the instep portion of the footwear, the instep guard being
3 positioned between the instep portion and the liner;

4 stitching around the instep guard attaching the liner to the instep portion.

1 12. The footwear of claim 11, further comprising:

2 a steel toe positioned on a toe portion of the upper, the instep guard being attached to the
3 toe portion.

1 13. An instep guard for use in an instep section of footwear to protect the metatarsals of a
2 foot, the instep guard comprising:

3 an elastic support having a shape and size commensurate with the instep section of the
4 footwear, the elastic support having a plurality of hollow passages.

1 14. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the elastic support includes:

2 a first sheet; and

3 a plurality of support members extending from the first sheet to define the plurality of the
4 hollow passages.

1 15. The instep guard of claim 13 further comprising a second sheet connected to the first
2 sheet by the plurality of support members.

1 16. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein at least some of the plurality of holes are defined
2 by the first sheet and the support members.

1 17. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the hollow passages are filled with air.

1 18. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the hollow passages are elongated.

1 19. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein at least one of the elongated hollow passages has
2 cross-section that is either circular, ovoid, or triangular in shape.

1 20. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the support members define a first type of
2 elongated passage with a first cross-section shape and a second type of elongated passage
3 with a second cross-section shape.

1 21. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the elastic support includes a resilient material.

1 22. The instep guard of claim 13, wherein the elastic support is positioned between the instep
2 portion of the footwear and a liner of the footwear.

1 23. Footwear for protecting a foot comprising:

2 an upper defining an opening, the upper including:

3 an instep portion to cover a metatarsal section of the foot, and

4 an elastic instep guard positioned on the instep portion to protect the metatarsal
5 section of the foot, the instep guard including an elastic support having a plurality of hollow
6 passages; and

7 an outsole attached to the upper to define a cavity that receives the foot through the
8 opening.

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